

S Korea to allow US beef back in

South Korea will resume US beef imports from Thursday following a deal between the two sides on extra safeguards, ruling party officials have said.

BBC News
June 25, 2008

A legal notice on new rules will be posted in the government gazette, the final step needed to restart imports.

South Korea suspended US beef imports in 2003 after a case of mad cow disease, or BSE, was identified there.

The decision in April to end the suspension sparked street protests and left the new government in crisis.

Protesters argued that the move failed to protect their health - although both governments said the beef was safe.

As the demonstrations escalated, envoys despatched by President Lee Myung-bak held talks with the US on putting additional safeguards into the deal to allay public concern.

Last week, after lengthy negotiations, Washington agreed not to export beef from cattle older than 30 months - which is thought to be at higher risk of BSE.

Apology

The South Korean government says the suspension can now be lifted.

"At the high-level party-government meeting today, it was decided that the agriculture minister will request the publication of the legal notice today and it will be published in the government newsletter tomorrow," a ruling party spokeswoman said.

Once that happens, US beef that has been in cold storage in South Korea for months could be inspected and then sent for sale.

The beef row has posed a significant challenge to Mr Lee, who took office in February. He says he backed the deal to help secure passage of a free trade agreement with the US, thus boosting South Korea's economy.

But last week, he made a televised apology to the nation for failing to appreciate the depth of public concern.

He then replaced seven top aides - a decision he said was aimed at giving his administration a fresh start.